

OCT 10 1967

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Defection of the heart

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It has often been assumed that communism, and other forms of social revolution, feed on misery.

This may be true. The common people of imperial Russia, like the people of Kuomintang China or of Batista's Cuba, had plenty to be miserable about. But most revolutions are not made by peasants. Often they are made by intellectuals, by the children of privilege with guilty consciences.

And when it comes to espionage the evidence is quite clear. The most damaging agents who have served the Communist cause have been those who lived closest to the centers of power and privilege in the non-Communist world. To some extent this is also true of penetration into Soviet intelligence circles.

The most shocking case has just been spelled out in the London newspapers: the defection of Kim Philby. This man, son of a distinguished father, went over to communism soon after he was an undergraduate at an ancient university. He was a full-fledged, trusted member of the Establishment. It seems to be agreed that the deep, unspoken confidence which members of the British Establishment had in one another disarmed them against disaffection.

Secrets known

Kim Philby came within a hair's breadth of becoming head of the British Secret Service. He was in fact for a considerable time chief of British Intelligence's Washington office, in charge of

contacts with the CIA and the FBI, and hence privy to a large part of American and British secret information and processes. Especially, he knew how much they knew about the Soviets and passed his knowledge on to Moscow, where he now resides in comfortable self-satisfaction. His son has just had a cozy family visit with him there.

There are cases of several Americans who are believed to have been Soviet agents, but the facts are not yet fully clear about them. Some of them still deny any complicity and continue to live in the United States. Only a very few have fled into Communist territory. But most of them, like Philby, were well-educated, the beneficiaries of much that is best in the Western world.

Story unrolls

Slowly evidence comes to light of other high-level penetrations. Some well-placed Germans, some Japanese, were apparently in contact with British or American sources. It may be a long time before the whole story is known. In general it will be seen that defection had its roots not in avarice but in intellectual disaffection.

Fidel Castro and Ernesto (Ché) Guevara were well-educated sons of the upper middle class. They were revolutionaries, not spies, but their activity proves the same basic point: That the struggle of our time is within the mind more than the body. Not hunger but anger motivates the most dangerous foes of the established order.

Doubtless we have not

heard the last of these sensational revelations. And yet we must not lose confidence in one another. When every man looks on his brother with the eye of suspicion, society is ready to disintegrate.

Banter recalled

Defection is a very sordid business, whatever its motivation. I shall never forget standing in a group in the White House including Vice-President Nixon, Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, and Chairman Khrushchev, when Messrs. Dulles and Khrushchev exchanged a kind of banter concerning spies who might be working for both of them. Their cynicism cloaked a dark aspect of the modern world. Such double agents must be the mercenaries. The zealots would not sell out to both sides, although some—like Philby—might appear to do so.

The Communists are undoubtedly recruiting agents throughout the Western world right now. The opposition to United States policy in Vietnam in many intellectual circles must give the recruiters a field day among those who are as deeply shocked as were some British in their opposition to fascism in the 1930's. It will be a long time before the air clears again or the defectors are identified.

It is a melancholy business. Probably we can grow out of it no faster than we make progress in basic understanding. There is a little light in that, spies in the sky—reconnaissance satellites—have removed altogether some areas of secrecy for both sides.